

didn't want to feel that pain again. As clients approach these inner parts—what I call “exiles”—they often experience them as inner children who fit one of the three categories of troubled attachment: insecure, avoidant, or disorganized. Typically, once one of these inner exiles reveals itself to the client, their Self automatically knows how to relate to that part in such a way that it'll begin to trust the Self. These inner children respond to the love they sense from the Self in the same way that abandoned or abused children do as they sense the safety and caring of an attuned caretaker. As parts become securely attached to Self, they let go of their terror, pain, or feelings of worthlessness and become transformed—a healing process that opens up access to a bounty of resources that had been locked away. When that happens, there's a growing trust in the Self's wisdom, and people increasingly manifest what I call the eight Cs of Self-leadership: curiosity, compassion, calm, courage, clarity, confidence, creativity, and connectedness. In other words, they return to a natural state of groundedness and embodiment.

Attachment Theory assumes that healing occurs only when one person becomes a healthy attachment figure for another—a therapist for a client, one spouse for another, or a parent for a child—exhibiting the kind of engaged, active mindfulness we've been discussing. However, Self-leadership opens the possibility of a different kind of attachment-based healing within a person, which can lead to a deep sense of personal empowerment.

The observer type of mindfulness meditation can reinforce the effects of this inner attachment, so that therapy and meditation complement and feed each other. I've encouraged many of my clients to practice the observer type of meditation between sessions, and have found that their progress is hugely accelerated. The meditations help people practice separating from and accepting their parts, while accessing and trusting the mindfulness state, which increases clients' ability for self-healing. The healing done in therapy, in turn, allows for deeper and less interrupted meditations. As clients become increasingly able to notice,

rather than blend with, the wounded parts of themselves that are triggered as they go through their daily lives, they become clearer about what needs attention in therapy sessions.

The Therapist's Role

With all this talk of self-healing, I don't want to downplay the importance of the client's relationship with the therapist. What does shift is the focus on the therapist from being the primary attachment figure to serving as an accepting container of awareness who opens space for the client's own Self to emerge. To do this, therapists must embody their own fullest Self, acting as a tuning fork to awaken the client's Self to its own resonance. To achieve this kind of embodiment, therapists must learn to be mindful of their own parts as they work with clients, recognizing that transference and countertransference are, at some level, a continuing behind-the-scenes dance as therapists and clients inevitably trigger each other. The inescapable reality of therapy is that, if we do our jobs well, clients will do all kinds of provocative things that repeatedly test us. They'll resist, get angry and critical, become hugely dependent, talk incessantly, behave dangerously between sessions, show intense vulnerability, idealize us, attack themselves, and display astounding narcissism and self-centeredness.

Some of this is because they have parts forged by relationships with hurtful caretakers that are stuck in the past and, as they sense our open-heartedness, all that gets ignited. The Self-led therapist is basically issuing the client an invitation: “All parts are welcome!” From the darkest corners of their psyches, aspects of clients that others never see emerge in all their crazy glory, and that's a good thing. When we aren't overwhelmed by our own parts and can remain Self-led, clients can get to know what's going on inside them, and healing emerges.

But therapists aren't Buddhas and regularly get triggered by the intensity of their interplay with their clients, whether they wish to acknowledge it or not. Fortunately, as you become

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Having spent nearly two decades in monasteries and temples training as a student of Zen, in addition to more than 20 years working as a clinical psychologist, I come to the practice of mindfulness differently from many psychotherapists. It was during the years I spent working full time with cancer patients, most of whom were facing disabling treatments or the threat of death, that I first recognized

The Shadow Side Med Getting stuck

the full power of mindfulness practice. At one point, frustrated and pained by the inability of traditional psychotherapy to address my patients' deepest concerns, I sat listening to Jane, a middle-aged woman with metastatic breast cancer, who'd just returned from a prolonged hospital stay. She described how, after her daily treatment, a well-intentioned chaplain or counselor would regularly come to her room, but, in her exhausted state, she often felt herself more annoyed than comforted by these visits.

“I know they were always trying to help,” she said, “but I was still uncomfortable with them. Then one day a new chaplain came in, sat down by my bed, and, instead of asking the usual questions, said nothing. He just looked at me with kindness and without expectation. He was clearly open to whatever was present for me. For a long time, we sat together in a warm and spacious silence that was so different from what I'd become used to. Then something shifted. I could feel myself coming alive for the first time in a long while. It was the most powerful spiritual experience I've ever had.”

Jane's story underscored for me what it meant to go beyond an ordinary “helping” relationship and how I could apply to my psychotherapy work what I was learning as a beginning Zen stu-

dent about awareness, presence, and a willingness to tolerate not-knowing and non-doing.

Detached Mindfulness

Full of enthusiasm for what I was discovering, I found a meditation center where many teachers and other students who had deep insight into the Buddha's teachings were cultivating a capacity to note, in precise detail,

man who adhered to the traditional constructs of the monastic setting, did little to help matters. While mindfulness practice had given Jim the capacity to witness his thoughts and feelings, no one was there to help him with what he was uncovering. In fact, his desire to satisfy the training demands of his teacher deepened his pattern of suffocating compliance to authority. He'd achieved a good deal of insight through dedicated mindful practice, but had no experience of healing intimacy.

As Jim and I talked, he indicated that he felt truly heard for the first time. As a result, his sense of shame and rigid isolation began to soften. With my encouragement, he learned to sit in meditation and turn toward the terrorized and angry parts of himself. By experiencing this new rela-

tional practice, Jim learned to extend mindful awareness to include self-care and self-acceptance, discovering how loving-kindness and compassion can become the natural fruit of mindfulness practice.

I've also often encountered teachers and students of meditation who misused their practices and the teachings on "non-attachment" to achieve what psychotherapist John Welwood aptly terms "spiritual bypassing." By turning inward during mindfulness meditation and cultivating a sense of apparent peace, practitioners can get the mistaken sense that they're free from the emotional conditioning of the past. As Welwood has written, "I have often been struck by the huge gap between the sophistication of [certain students'] spiritual practice and the level of their personal development. Some of them have spent years doing what they considered the most advanced, esoteric practices, reserved for only the select few in traditional Asia, without developing the rudimentary forms of self-love or interpersonal sensitivity." By simply taking on the roles and rituals of the tradition, some students whom I knew were trying to avoid the places of pain and suffering that had brought them to spiritual practice in the first

place. This is the shadow side of meditation practice that I was experiencing.

Mindfulness and Intimacy

Although the path of transformation laid out by the Buddha is a complete path to awakening, it's too often taught by meditation teachers in ways that strip it of its original capacity to transform suffering. As Zen teacher Norman Fischer, puts it, "Robes, chanting, ceremony, tradition, text study, and all the rest may be valuable in their own right, but their real purpose lies in the service of the path toward maturity. In spiritual practice, we use these traditional techniques and practices as *vehicles to warmly connect* us so that we can help each other to find the true, lasting, and ongoing maturity that each of our lives requires." It's a capacity for warm connection that supports our fuller development and helps us find our way through the tangles of everyday suffering. Just as relying on insight alone in the consulting room isn't enough, neither is simply witnessing our inner conditioning on the meditation cushion enough.

As a Zen teacher and psychotherapist, I've seen again and again the power of combining both a keen awareness of the present moment with a warm heart for all that's encountered. When this happens, especially when rooted in a relationship with a skilled teacher or a seasoned therapist, mindfulness goes beyond just being a technique for focusing nonjudgmental attention to become a pathway toward true spiritual maturity.

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of by FLINT SPARKS **itation** *in the present moment*

all that was arising in our hearts and minds as we sat in meditation. All too often, however, aside from continuing to witness our thoughts, feelings, memories, and bodily sensations, we weren't shown ways to work with what arose in meditation. The traditional instruction to "just sit with it" didn't seem to be enough to undo trauma or to relieve the painful imprint of abusive histories. Although we could occasionally achieve periods of emotional relief through meditation practice, we often continued to suffer in our mindfully cultivated silence and stillness. As a therapist, I knew that more was possible, and I was saddened to see so many lovely, wounded people unable to achieve the liberation they sought through spiritual practice.

One day, a fellow Zen student named Jim tearfully confided in me that he was struggling with feelings of terror and resentment as he sat in the meditation hall. The silence and cool detachment of the spiritual community's life reminded him of his abusive father's silent disdain at his not being the son he wanted. Having never been able to please his father, Jim now felt that he was reliving the sense of failure and humiliation from his childhood. His relationship with his teacher, a formal

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